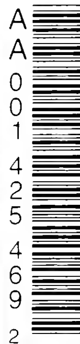
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SHAKSPERE'S MISSION & OFFICE

AS THE

DRAMATIC & HISTRIONIC POET

OF THE

ENGLISH PEOPLE

(*With some comments on Mr. Clement Scott's severe strictures on the Sta.*)

BEING AN

Address read at the Closing Meeting

OF THE

Session of the Manchester Shakspere Club,

BY THE PRESIDENT

JAMES T. FOARD, ESQ.,

BARRISTER AT LAW.

April, 1898.

PRICE SIXPENCE.

MANCHESTER:

J. E. CORNISH, 16 ST. ANN'S SQUARE

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WE are met proximately on this 282nd anniversary of the death of the Poet, "who was not of an age but for all time," to affirm and renew our homage and fealty* at his honoured shrine. In a week from this we shall have arrived at the 334th recurrence of his natal day, the day of our English Patron Saint St. George, on which the poet certainly died. I have been requested to place a Votive wreath on that splendid Mausoleum of his life, his works; which he himself, the only fit Architect of such a Cenotaph, erected to his eternal honour and glory. Many thousands of similar worshippers in every age, in every country where the English language is heard, and where is it not, have assembled to place similar wreaths as tokens of devotion, and of more or less transitory significance, to wither and crumble away. But the unassailable Altar remains. Without the necessity of making a pilgrimage to Delphi, Eleusis, or Parnassus, or even Stratford; we are here with the desire to express in some feeble sort our sense of obligation. We are unworthy worshippers, but no man can give more than he possesses. We yield what we can. I admit at once my unfitness as your spokesman, repine at it, deprecate all malignity of criticism as doing my best, and simply obey your commands.

I must confess I have been present on various occasions, now long since passed, when similar tribute has been paid of a worthier kind at the same season. I can recall, and do so with fond and grateful recollection, when in 1859 I heard George Dawson, with full and scholarly appreciation, with a colloquial eloquence and aptitude of phraseology granted to few, expound from the practical business-like Birmingham standpoint, but not without poetic admiration and a chastened love, the urbane many sided, commercial-traveller-and-bagman view of the worldly, successful, actor Manager of the Globe Theatre. The scholarly orator was full of admiration for the poor lad who had to fly his native town, then little more than a village (in our modern view), to start as a call boy, and become in turn, strolling vagabond and player, and yet who was able to return in less than twenty years, a landed proprietor and an Esquire bearing arms, high in respect and honour of all with whom he had been brought in contact, or by whom he was known. This was a genuine, commercial, and business-like success. It was practical and was much appreciated by the majority of his audience.

(*). Homage, says Littleton, is the most honourable service of reverence that a free man may render to his Lord. His fealty is the more sacred, for though it is incident to homage the tenant is sworn thereto.

I can recall in the year 1863* a dinner in the classic precincts of St. John's Gate in the very room in which Sam. Johnson once ate his meals behind a screen to hide his shabby clothes, and where more remotely the great Knight's Templars formerly held feast and sway, and where little Davy Garrick, the bankrupt trader, who had, according to one of his good-natured friends, three bottles of vinegar in a cellar, and called himself a wine merchant, first played in "The Mock Doctor," and made his trembling and fearsome *debût* in a career which finally landed him in Westminster Abbey. Dr. Westland Marston, the suave and merciful critic, and the author of "The Patrician's Daughter" and other dramas, was in the chair, and Henry Marston (no relative), an old Pauline, one of the most accomplished actors who ever graced the British stage, proposed as a toast the theme of that and this evening's address, "The Bard of Avon," The Divine Williams, as the French phrase it. He poured out a libation, as to one of the immortal Gods, with pure unstinted scholarly and appreciative praise: full of knowledge, as that of a man who had spent a lifetime in the study of his great author, eloquent and sympathetic: as being offered by one who admired the Bard, in each respect, as poet and actor, and as manager, and honoured him in all. These are but incidental memories, but in what attitude shall I, a mere lawyer, approach him to-night. In what aspect of his omniscient presence first assail him. As Statesman, Historian, Author, Manager, Actor, Playwright, Sailor, Soldier, Lawyer, Orator, Philosopher, Patriot, Catholic or Protestant. As Naturalist or Traveller, as Scotch or Welsh, as Mad Doctor or first Master Mariner, or on which of his many other sides, first attack him. To-night, I prefer my assault on his memory as an Englishman; as the incarnation of the noblest qualities and best attributes of his race; as the embodiment of its loftiest ideals and noblest characteristics.

Whichever side I approach, I shall be in reference to achievement, the Poet's altitude and my own accomplishment, an object of pity, but I seek to enlist your sympathy on this account. A man who will not dare in a righteous cause to court even failure, is a just object of contempt. I take, therefore, as my text, Shakspere the Poet, the high priest of Apollo, the leader, ruler and creator, the solace, the instructor of mankind, as an Englishman.

Why, you may ask, when dealing with a writer so many-sided, so impersonal, seize on this limited aspect. Because, I dare to hope, it is the one on which he is most vulnerable.

(*) On the 13th of June, 1860, at Knowle, Mr. Timmin's proposal to found a Shakspere Library in that City was discussed and considered by the Birmingham Shakspere Club. Donations were then promised, and the suggestion which has given such a magnificent endowment and heritage to that city was fully launched.

Because I must commence somewhere, as you are beginning, no doubt, to think; and I cannot hope to grapple fully, even if imperfectly, with any phase. I, therefore, choose for the subject of our contemplation, "William Shakspere as the Playwright and Poet Dramatist of the English People."

Apart from his so-called works, jestingly termed plays, he has written verse which, as Poetry pure and simple, is as wise and melodious and as perfect in rhythmic construction as any. In this he also touched the highest watermark of human excellence, and of finite passion and emotion, dithyrambic and sensuous; but his plays are his wisdom and his strength. In these are enshrined the resources of his mighty mind. In these are laid up the secrets of his penetrative intuition, his varied experiences of life, and the philosophic and metaphysic insight disclosed by his genius and universal intelligence.

Epic poetry has been said to be the most elevated of all poetry, as enshrining each form—lyric, descriptive, dramatic, dithyrambic—within itself, and as epitomising all. With this opinion Aristotle did not concur. He, the wisest and most accomplished of all antique critics, placed the tragedies of Æschylus and Sophocles in the place of honour. It is obvious that the rarest and most unattainable gift accorded to finite intelligence is that of including and comprehending other minds. The dominant capacity must be that which is capable of grasping, absorbing, and bounding all other capacities. It must be the loftiest, as being the most universal, as a whole is greater than its parts, and as the circumference of a circle must be more than a segment of the same circle. Thus the Dramatic faculty in its highest form is that which compasses all inferior capabilities. It presumes to think as a lower intelligence would think, under certain given and altered conditions, acting as it would act, and talking as it would talk, and thus arrogates the most elevated and divine of human attributes.

To pass from the abstract proposition to the concrete instance. The mind that can think and act like Ulysses, like Brutus, like Henry the Fifth, that can present us with lofty ideals of character as mirrored in Hamlet, in Antonio, in Timon, in Lear, apart from their native infirmities, must include within itself all these various and diverse idiosyncracies. Thus to very few indeed in the world's history has been granted this semblably superhuman capacity. Milton, Byron, Wordsworth, to cite from our own poetical celebrities, had no such gifts of acute metaphysical analysis in any appreciable degree. All Byron's characters, like Cain, Marino Faliero, Manfred, were but reproduced images and pictures of himself. He could not escape from his own personality. He drew imaginary beings in all conceivable attitudes and situations, but Byron's face appeared

through the too transparent mask of all. His puppets all spoke with one voice. They were but imperfectly ventriloquial. He could no more escape from himself than poor Mr. Dick from Charles the First. This was similarly true of the other Poets named. As describers and delineators of other men, some of the Novelists—Dickens, Thackeray, or Sir Walter Scott—have in part succeeded better than the Poets. But their principal heroes and heroines are limned from without, not from within. They are masters of descriptive and penetrative narrative only. We are as readers never summoned to commune with their personalities while they think. We are not allowed to follow and join in the mental operations of the minds of the actors as we follow the processes of the mind in Macbeth, in Hamlet, or in Shylock.

Brutus in Shakspere was a well-known Roman citizen, one of the foremost figures in the antique world. If we compare the speeches assigned by Shakspere to Brutus, with those that Republican actually delivered on other topics on other occasions, you will find that the creator of the character not only acts and declaims for the time like Brutus, but thinks as he did. If you examine the correspondence of the Patriot preserved to us, you will find that the ideal image presented by the Poet cogitates, expresses himself and acts, under altered conditions, precisely as the real man thought and wrote, in fact and in history. The Dramatist had mastered not merely the Historic man, but had also so far analysed and traced the mechanism of his mind and discovered the springs of those motives which impelled him, that we look not merely on the form of the Hero, but on the constraining causes, by which he was moved. We gaze, so to speak, not on the hands and face of the clock, but are made familiar with its machinery, and are able to trace the adjustments, by which the whole is governed and sustained This is one of the distinctive features of the Drama our Author has created. His plots are autonomous, his men are autonomous. Unlike the Greek plays, in which the heroes move only, as they are constrained by the Gods, his drama evolves its plot and action from the motives of humanity. The story, whatever it may be, with its plan, progress, and final catastrophe, is but the sequel and result of the thought and action of the animating personality. Destiny or fate, or external influences count for little. From first to last, Macbeth moves but as his passions urge him. He is hurried on by his ambition and selfishness from crime to crime, bloody, vindictive, remorseless, to his final ruin and fatal end. This is indeed the secret of all the Tragedies. They all depend on the idiosyncracies of their heroes. Their follies, vices, infirmities and passions are the solution alike of incident, plot, story and circumstance.

In truth, Shakspere was not in reference to his Art so much the painter as the maker of men. His Hamlet, his Othello, his Shylock, his Macbeth, are more real to the whole world, than any actual Historic personage or Hero of their own, or of any age. What are Coligny, Don John, or even the Chevalier Bayard, to you, and yet they are exactly and elaborately embalmed in history. Volumes of narrative, in panegyric and description, have been penned in their praise and in that of their real or assigned Virtues, and still they remain strangers to most of us. Or to adopt instances from our own History; what are Sir Philip Sydney, Leicester, Sir Anthony Shirley, Sir Walter Raleigh, or the heroes of the commonwealth, familiar as they are to most of us, compressed in prosaic Biography. They are but Shadows, "Who come like Shadows, so depart."

But the Poet's men and women live again with us. They think and talk and act as if alive. What says Pierce Penniless, "How would it have joyed brave Talbot (the terror of the French) to think that after he had lain 200 years in his Tomb, he should triumph again on the stage, and have his bones new embalmed with the tears of ten thousand spectators at least (at several times) who, in the Tragedian that represents his person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding?" Shakspere by his art, indeed, breathes the breath of life into these dead heroes of History, and they spring up vital, animated, endowed with full volition, energy, power of thought and desire; a great army in full panoply and array. He infused his soul into their dead bones. He not merely seems to look through their eyes, but to speak through their lips as if they had renewed life. These are no Puppets moved by wires and jerked from without; but living men re-endowed with all their natural gifts in their habits as they lived. What said Heine on this point? he, being a Jew and inimical to England and all things English; we and our land being denounced by him as a cheerless unrefreshing country, and a repulsive people, straight-ruled, hide-bound, home-made, selfish, angular, anglican, these are his precise epithets, declared; "That being in Venice, he was haunted everywhere by Shakspere. That if he went on to the Rialto, he looked for Shylock, and again in the Synagogue, he expected him to start up and outface him. That in that glorious city rescued from the sea, amid all its ancient and renowned associations, architectural magnificence and splendid memories, he felt Shylock's presence everywhere, saw him with his white talar on his head, praying more fervently devout, true worshipper, and Hebrew that he was, than any of his fellow devotees, and lifting up his soul full of wild and stormy passions to the great and inexorable Jehovah, as he believed in him." Is not this homage? Is not this a tribute to the commanding

Genius of the straight-ruled, hide-bound, angular, Anglican.

With this enthusiastic and appreciative admiration of Shakspere's creative realism, Mr. Zangwill, a modern Hebrew, lecturing a short time since in Manchester, did not concur. He then said Shakspere could not paint a true Hebrew, because he had not seen one. If Mr. Zangwill, whose experience has perhaps been with a limited and more debased class of Israelite, and there are Jews and Jews, had been content to state his opinion and offer no reasons for his belief, we could take it at its worth. But in assigning a reason, he discredited his own testimony. Why Gondomar the Spanish Ambassador to James I., one of the best known figures in England of his day, was a Jew; Perez and Lopez, both well-known to the Poet, political intriguants both, the one a doctor, and possibly Florio the author of the Dictionary, and translator of Montaigne, were all Jews. Though there were no Jewish rites sanctioned, there were many Hebrews in this country, presumably from the time of Edward the third. They were nominally Flemings, Italians and Spaniards in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. However, I do not propose to wander into an unprofitable discussion as an episode; I am content to say, that if personal knowledge of the higher forms of Semitic character and idiosyncracy were needed he had full opportunities of acquiring it, even if he did not, as many experts have believed, visit Italy. Personal knowledge, was however, no more requisite in Shylock's case than in that of Hamlet, or Cæsar, Brutus, Cicero, or Timon; and I pit Heine's acumen and intelligence, and his unbounded enthusiasm, against Mr. Zangwill's perfunctory condemnation pretty confidently.

As a Dramatist and Poet, Shakspere the Englishman was the furthest reach and achievement of the even tolerance, the superabundant energy, the patriotism, the enterprise, the independance, the individual resource of the English mind. In his philosophy, illustrated in his Dramas; is epitomised the most beneficent, regal, contemplative and chivalrous attributes of our race. He is the sum of all our greatness. He is the accepted exponent of our proudest ambitions, the accredited creator and depositary of our most exalted ideals. The supremest nation is the creator of truly transcendent ideals. The Nation's Poet is the creator of such ideals. The kingly majesty of Henry the Vth, the patriotism of Talbot and John O'Gaunt, the daring of Falconbridge, the noble tolerance of the Duke in "Measure for Measure;" the benignity of Prospero; these compass the full circle of our native claim to superiority of mental resource, and to the great fortunes comprised in our destiny. Let us then console ourselves with this, that no man has imagined or thought of nobler men, or of purer and holier women than he has created out of the men and women of England he knew.

There can be little doubt that the period in which Shakspere appeared on the world of action was eminently favourable for the evolution of his mind and art. It was an altogether heroic age. The emancipation from the thraldom of Papal tyranny had given an impetus and zest to every species of learning. The translation of the Bible and the invention of printing had quickened the sources of individual thought, and of mental, moral and spiritual independence. Our wars in defence of religion in the low countries, and against Philip and his armies on the Continent, and the defeat of his vaunted Armada, stimulated the nobler resources of our nature as patriots, as soldiers, as statesmen. Common danger begets a common heroism, uncommon perils develope uncommon resources. We were menaced on every side, the league of our foes, Spanish, Italian and French united in the Papal bond, intriguing among our nobles, assailing us in Holland, threatening us in the West of Ireland, conspiring with the Irish and the Scotch, tasked all our manhood. Happily we proved equal to our fortunes. Thus, it is, that the many sided, resourceful, vital and exuberant qualities of true and complete English life of that enterprising time have been preserved; to be a pattern to our children and our children's children, and an ideal for our contemplation for ever.

This full tide of existence is embodied in Shakspere's Drama. The characters in his plays epitomise the life we then enjoyed. Not every age has its Homer. There were great men before Agamemnon, but no blind bard to record or sing his great achievements. Shakspere has hymned the praises of the most chivalrous and romantic figure of his age. Of the Earl of Essex, the hero of Cadiz, in the chorus and text of Henry the Vth, as well as of John O'Gaunt, and the great Talbot. He enshrined all the essential aspects of our famous Island story; Agincourt, Poitiers, Rouen, Shrewsbury, and Bosworth Field. Thus our English Drama which may be said to have been comprised in Shakspere's working life (of 25 years), presents us with a picture in little, of English History and English fortunes in a period of transcendant glory, and in all their most vivid and vital variety. The plays mirror the aspects of our political institutions, our laws and lawlessness, our struggles for freedom of thought and independent national existence; and thus form a brief encyclopædia of all the volcanic changes of fortune, and of dynasty, and the convulsions and revolutions we had then gone through. They are an abstract; as living and real as the Chronicles they enshrine.

The defect of Elizabethan literature has been said by the more tame and degenerate spirits of our own day to have been "over-ornamentation, exaggeration in sentiment and of expression, and the absence of simplicity." Marlowe, Shakspere's first chief and great master, the Canterbury cobbler's son, "Marlowe of the mighty line" struck the key note. Tamerlane, it cannot be

denied, was in a high sonorous stalking vein. With as much irony as Shakspere ever indulged in, he satirised this mock heroic manner in the inflated jargon of ancient Pistol. The hyperbolic tall talk, the robustious bombast of Jeronimo, the violence of incident, and the ferocity and brutality displayed in the elder Dramas, viz., "The Jew of Malta," "Locrine," "Titus Andronicus," the two parts of Jeronimo, "The Yorkshire Tragedy," are no doubt like Tamerlane, strong food. They were more or less Gothic and based on the traditions of an older day, and Shakspere's two earliest compositions, or those in which a principal share was his, reflect these peculiarities. They supplied the suggestions for the vigorous contrasts of violent cruelty and passion delineated in Lear, Othello and Macbeth, which appear pitched so much above the standard, of ordinary humdrum respectability, and the perfect civic life.

Shakspere in truth was but an artistic and poetic interpreter of the scenes and emotions he saw about him. The soldiers, adventurers, men of action, heroes and statesmen were persons he had met and known. He perhaps had known no soldier so brightly mercurial and witty as Mercutio, but he had often talked with Raleigh. That Ixion career was in his ken. A wise and discriminating critic of the past year has said, "The comprehensiveness of his Shakspere's mind and sympathy is so wide that it seems at first as if he had no special sympathies at all." With this opinion I cannot (if I understand it aright) concur. He betrayed no sympathies in his work in detail. He did not pretend to be didactic. To have shown leaning or bias would have been to violate the very purpose of his art and to have "over stepped the modesty of nature." He has declared his view of the players duty as the interpreter of a play, the purpose of playing being:—"To hold as t'were the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own image scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." This clearly was the Poet's conception of dramatic representation and its proper function. Thus he believed in, defined and abridged, his duty. This was his limitation of his art, but with due subordination to his purpose, he was in no wise hindered from declaring his special sympathies always on the side of right, for the cultivation of mercy, honour, valour, friendship, self-restraint, courtesy, patriotism, pity, generosity and the other virtues; but always without pretence, without discoverable aim, and without violation of the fundamental-canons of all true art.

What then was his mission as he understood it; his business as he illustrated it; his purpose as he has declared it. To do precisely what Greek art proposed to itself to do. That which the Hellenic Sculptor attempted in his representation of the human form—to generalise the individual; universalise the single

instance—just as the Venus of Milo embodies the perfection of form to be discovered in no one woman in the universal world. To unite the perfection of all forms in one ideal figure at the will of the artist. Thus the Helen of Zeuxis was an abstract of the perfection of form and beauty of all women. Romeo in like manner is not so much a picture of a single lover, as of all lovers. He was an ideal lover. Hamlet is an image, not of one merely contemplative, imaginative and philosophic doubter, but of all questioning, cynical and speculative scholars; as Timon is of all misanthropes, Othello of all jealous husbands, and Macbeth of all unscrupulous and ambitious tyrants. It is true that the general picture thus presented is made human and real by some artifice and trivial instance, as by the "Prithee undo this button" of Lear, or the abstracted "Very like, very like" of Hamlet, and the "What man ne'er pull your hat upon your brows," and the "He has no children" in Macbeth. These were the tricks of art, these lend the "Touch of Nature which makes the whole world kin." The Poet's portraits are none of them individual, they are abstract reflections of human nature, mirroring life so far individualised as to be human, in no sense mere photographs of the people he knew, but yet embodying and epitomising their virtues, capacities and life, in a general idealised and exalted way.

It has been complained of the Poet that we gain from his plays no insight into the vital features of the History going on about him, of the religious fervour of the Puritans, of that struggle for freedom of thought and speech, then fermenting in the bosoms of his countrymen, or of that intolerance of Regal tyranny so soon to be manifested after his death.

There appears, it must be at once conceded, no consciousness of those vast impending issues already ripening for decision, or of the ever increasing increment of vice ensuing on the corruption of the court and times. This is obvious. His Drama was a mirror only, a mirror of men and of their constant and enduring features and events and acts, and of representative people and their doings, not of opinions, not of fugitive or transient, or accidental peculiarities, not of mere principles, nor of speculations. In this manner, there are no traces of theories of heredity, no pictures of abnormal types of humanity, or of abnormal features in such humanity. We have no impossible types of virtue and vice, of the kirk or the kennel respectively. He offers us no problems based on unnatural characteristics, either of unsexed men or of over-sexed or too sexual women. He has no museum of monstrosities or freaks. No Hedda Gabblers, no Mrs. Tanquerays or Dorian Grays, or Heavenly Twins, no Bestial Idols. No Women with pasts, or afflicted with unspeakable vices. His theatre was not a dissecting table. His resemblances were neither realistic nor impressionist, to adopt the modern slang. His aspects were of a counterfeit presentment, at

once gracious and benign. His pictures were pleasant and elevating presentations of nature and humanity. They were not base counterfeits of disease and crime. They presented life not so much as it is, as it ought to be. What I have now said may appear to conflict or even to contradict what was suggested with reference to Brutus, Henry V., John O'Gaunt, or Falconbridge. But recognised and authentic pictures, of well-known men, like those of Antony, Cassius, Cæsar, Decimus Brutus, Cicero, or even of such mythic heroes as Ulysses, Hector, Thersites, Ajax, as they have been presented by Homer, or in the antique drama, are intended to be individual likenesses. Still this in no wise conflicts, with the presentation of ideal representatives of the passions or emotions. in an impersonal and universal sense, or such a combined and idealised expression of their character as I insist on.

The Shaksperean drama in contrast with that of Aristophanes, or of Ben Jonson, assumes to be the mirror of nature: it aspires to reflect life as a whole. The plays of Moliere (and generally this may be said of Greek, Roman and French comedy), only aimed at a satiric presentation of the manners and fashions of the day. They presented the fugitive and transitory follies, political abuses and frivolities of the hour, the fleeting aspects of life. This was the characteristic of Ben Jonson's comedies. "Every Man in his humour," and "out of his humour." "Volpone," "Bartholomew Fair," "The Silent Woman," copying the comedies of Plautus and Aristophanes, aimed at nothing more than the satiric delineation of peculiarites. Crites, Pantilius Tucca, Clove and Orange, Hedon and Anaides, are not so much individual portraits as superficial and savage caricatures. If they are types, they are types of which no other human instance or example occurred. Roman comedy was but the echo of that of Greece, and Jonson based his plays wholly on antique example. English comedy on the other hand as created by Shakspere offers us the living portraiture of man, man made in the image of his Maker. On this account no doubt, Heine vividly speaks of the Shaksperean drama as the true worlds gospel, and of the Poet as the Sun of English Life, its light and luminary, its vivifying power and leavening influence, alike its stimulus and splendour, its grace and glory. The essence of Greek Tragedy it has been well said, is to prove man's powerlessness in the hands of the Gods. That it presented its heroes struggling against fate. This was its didactic lesson. Shakspere offers us another teaching. He is anti-fatalistic. With him man is the author of his own destinies, the carver of his own career, the source alike of his own fortunes and misfortunes. Humanity is imperial, and is the prime mover and controller of events, and the source of power in the Universe, by which it is surrounded.

On this ground then, if on no other, we must assign to Shakspere the pre-eminent distinction that he first gave to humanity in the Drama its true place in the Universe. Man neither in Tragedy nor Comedy is with him, the blind and passive instrument of the caprice or enmity of the Gods. He is no slave. In the Eschylean Tragedy man is an automaton, he merely fulfils his fate. The avenging deities control his every fortune. He suffers for the inexpiable crimes of his ancestors. In Shakspere all the heroes carve out their own calamities; Romeo, Macbeth, Hamlet, Brutus and Cassius, Iago, Richard III., are the sole ministers to their own misfortunes. In this aspect the Drama becomes a mirror or picture of nature and life, and real men whom we have known, seem to occupy the stage. Authorities as widely severed in sentiment, nationality and feeling as Garibaldi and Mr. Lowell have said "that Shakspere intended to impersonate in Hamlet not a mere metaphysical entity, but a man of flesh and blood." Thus we seem to know even the minor characters; Shylock the Jew, Mercutio the ready and reckless man of fashion, Falconbridge, the outspoken soldier, Antonio the faithful friend. In this, it is a Drama of character, of man's individualism and personality. He thus occupies his due position in nature, and lives his own life. The Antique Drama offered us the sorry spectacle of a mortal in conflict with immortals. Its tragedy was the vain struggle of the foredoomed victim against the *force majeure* of his ancestral crimes, the animosity of the Gods, or the curse of his race. Ægisthus, Clytemnestra, Orestes, suffer for the sins of Atreus.

In contrast, the modern drama of free-will indicates the universal by the particular, the general by the individual. The character is of a type. Thus Imogen the perfect wife, is an idealised example of the flawless matron; it is the universal prototype of complete womanhood embodied. This is not less true of Cordelia, or Helena, or Desdemona, or Isabella, in their respective fashions, nor indeed of any of the Poet's characters. The "Persona" is the mask for the race. In this wise the dramatist's plays offer the variety, the spontaneity, and the exuberance of nature. They are not trammelled by the unities of time and place. Unity of story and of action are alone regarded. Thus Othello gives us scenes in Venice and Cyprus, at the house of Brabantio, on the quay and in the castle, and we are transferred from place to place at the will and by the magic art of the Author. Summarised, the result is a drama of character and action, of circumstance and adventure, as varied as the national life of the people for whom it was intended. It is, indeed, its abstract and brief chronicle, its epitome in little, and like Macbeth's face, it is as a book where men may read strange matters.

This aspect of man as the arbiter of his own destiny is not the limit of the modern play. It was of the very essence of the age. It reflected the very spirit, the form and pressure of the hour. This accounts for, and in part explains the occasionally lavish ornament and gaudy spectacles, the casual obscurities, the brilliant blaze, the processions, tournaments, sieges, battles, the alternations of gloom and dazzle, the sumptuous wantonness, complexity, fertility, and in a word, the irridescence of Shakspere's dramas.

One aid, operating to this freedom and even liberty of treatment, was that our manners and modes of speech were then more or less unconstrained. Thus the independence of language and defiance assigned to King John, in his challenge to the Pope, was evidence of the intellectual emancipation we had recently attained. In like manner, the philosophic and metaphysic doubts of Hamlet, the passionate invective of Timon, the outstretched poesy of some of Macbeth's soliloquies, were of one proof and texture. They all proclaimed freedom. They all asserted as with one voice, release from Papal tyranny. They were declarations, lusty with the vigour, self-confidence and impatience of restraint of youth. They were void of all fear. The dungeons of the inquisition, the terrors of burning and of the stake, had vanished. The vision of Milton was in fact realised. "The noble and puissant nation was rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks; the eagle was mewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full mid-day beam."

The essential phase of this dignified exaltation of humanity in the Universe as the source of action and power. in contrast with the view expressed by Pope, is declared by Hamlet. He says of man: "How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a God, the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals.' Pope apostrophises him as a "vile reptile, weak and vain, his lot only to suffer and die," and as "Great Lord of all things yet a prey to all." These perceptions mark that author's highest vision. In strong contrast, all the stories that have been selected by the National Poet as the foundation of his plays, enunciate man's superiority and dignity. The respective tragedies of Lear, Macbeth, Timon, Coriolanus, Hamlet, establish his imperialism and governance. They all revolve on the idiosyncrasies of the central self-controlling, self-sustaining and ruling man. The comedies and histories not less. Henry the Vth, Angelo, Shylock, Leontes, Richard IInd and IIIrd are the moving causes of the plot and action in the respective plays in which they appear. This extends to all the minor episodes and incidents which are employed and introduced to

illustrate and amplify the personality of the central character. The robbery by Henry at Gad's Hill, and his noble response to Westmoreland before Agincourt, when he wished for more men,

"If we are marked to die we are enow," &c.

are incidents equally intended to discover and unfold the heroes' personality. In like manner, Lear's misguided affection and folly is employed chiefly as a key to unlock the characters of Goneril and Regan, Kent, Gloucester, and Edgar. The story proceeds in simple evolution of their ordinary courses of action. Similarly Timon's reverse of fortune flows from his nature, his want from his wantonness, his hatred from his too confiding love of mankind, his misanthrophy is his mercy, gone mad.

I cannot, however, disguise from myself the fact that the position I assume in this address for Shakspere as Philosopher, Poet, and Teacher, will jar on the sensibilities of very many estimable and worthy people. By association the National Poet's name and fame are coupled with that of the stage. He is a Playwright. He wrote for the play-house. The theatre in all ages has been connected in the minds of the ordinary and average citizen, with profanity and vice; and even with fair, pure-minded and tolerant persons, with very much that is immoral, lascivious and sensuous, if not sensual.

Mr. Clement Scott, a well-known and admired critic, a popular author and dramatic writer, has within the past few months, indirectly condemned (from the stand-point "of an intimate connection with the stage of more than thirty-seven years duration") its ministrations, its teachings and results. He thinks that the constant presence of the "showy and the alluring" must inevitably have a deleterious, often a dangerous, influence on persons devoted to its allurements." He thinks compendiously, to use a well-worn phrase, the theatre "a vanity, a delusion, and a snare." That there is no school on earth "so bad for the formation of character, or that so readily, so quickly, so inevitably, draws out all that is worst in man or woman, as the stage." If this is a sound conclusion, it will surely be advanced adversely as an oblique, but severe condemnation of the great Poet of the modern and christian world. For he is best known to us as a caterer for the play-houses, and it is suggested by one who professedly coming to bless the drama, curses it altogether.

How far then is this hostile indictment of histrionic entertainment; just, candid and unprejudiced. Presumably, Mr. Scott must be the furthest removed from prejudice, for he derives his livelihood from the stage and its belongings, as critic, writer, author, translator, essayist and editor; even if he be not more closely and intimately associated. If he condemns honestly, from his superior eminence, how can it be otherwise than that religious

devout, and God-fearing people with smaller opportunities of knowledge, who have been taught from infancy to shun the play-house as a pitfall of Satan, as a home of frivolity and vice, as a temple of impurity dedicated to the unclean gods; should, with honest and reasonable sincerity, join not less heartily in mis-apprehension and misgiving, censure and dislike. Without impugning, however, Mr. Scott's motives, or certainly the indiscretion of his strictures, I may mention that he has withdrawn his allegations and apologised. He confesses himself mistaken, and in fact admits that he generalized unjustly on imperfect premises.

I should not have referred to this incident, but that it appears to me, a symptom, of a widespread and I must also add ignorant intolerance, directed alike against the Drama and those associated with it. It matters little that the whole conclusion which links the Poet to the stage is based on a false inference. People reason very little in arriving at a prejudice. The antipathy exists, in spite of, in opposition to, all reason. As against the stage, it may be partially well founded—I say, may be—not that it is, but it must be remembered, that if Shakspere was never acted, his poems as poetry, for their eloquence, their magnificence of diction, their fervency of expression, their just and pious sentiments, their tolerance, charity, magnaninimity of feeling, quick sense of honour, omniscience in knowledge and their philosophy, would still be unrivalled, and shorn of none, or few, of their merits or attractions. Charles Lamb went the length of saying, "that the works of the Swan of Avon ought never to be acted." They were to him a perfect literature. I wholly disagree with him in this fantastic suggestion. As to the major part of them, they were written for nothing else but to be played; but this view indicates how far the poet and the theatre are several and severable. The theatre with other authors and other plays may minister to profanity and vice; with Shakspere they cannot. My claims are for the beneficence of all the ministrations of the dramatist, as teacher and leader to virtue only. If he be ever used and employed to vice, if he could be so used, surely my position would be false and unfounded. By their fruits you shall know them, is certainly as sound in doctrine and as a discrimination in literature, as in all other practical experience. It matters nothing that the work shall be cast in a dramatic or stage form, and is to be represented to the life, if its purpose is excellent, and is wholly directed to the furtherance of virtue, to the maintenance of manhood, to the advance and sustenance of truth, honour, and fidelity; how can it be other than admirable and beneficent. The teaching of the Poet's plays is not merely to the pursuit of these laudable ends, but to the honour and enforcement of revealed religion, in its most ennobling aspects as far as it is known.

Let us then consider what the nature of the prejudice against the stage is, and how it has arisen. I speak of it as a prejudice because I not only believe it to be so, but think it as mischievous, pernicious and misguided a heresy as any that ever infected the human race. Let me offer an illustration. In a criticism published some years ago, it is said from the pen of a great nonconformist divine, this was written :—

> "Shakspere has been called, and justly too, the Poet of Nature. A slight acquaintance with the religion of the Bible will show, however, that it is of human nature in its worst form, deformed by the basest passions and agitated by the most vicious propensities ; that the poet became the Priest, and the incense offered at the Altar of his Goddess will continue to spread its poisonous fumes over the hearts of his countrymen till the memory of his works is extinct. Thousands of unhappy spirits, and thousands yet to increase their number will everlastingly look back with unutterable anguish on the nights and days in which the plays of Shakspere ministered to their guilty delights, and yet these are the plays which men consecrated to the services of Him who styles himself the Holy One, have prostituted their pens to illustrate. Epithets amounting to idolatry and honours approaching to blasphemy have been and are shamelessly heaped upon his memory by a country professing itself Christian, and for which it would have been happy on moral considerations if he had never been born, and strange to say, even our religious edifices are not free from the pollution of his praise." Even in this year of grace, 1898, in reference to the Stratford Shakspere celebrations, it has been said in Exeter Hall, "Idolatrous observances are being paid to a lost soul (Shakspere) now in perdition."

These aspersions which epitomise so much of the bigotry and animosity as well as of the ignorance of persons unacquainted with the poetry of Shakspere, must be accepted at their worth, and against them may be pitted the testimony of two of the most eminent scholars and divines of our generation. The present most learned Bishop of Oxford when lecturing on the Poet, hypothetically questioned one of his own statements that the Bard was inspired, thus :—"How could he speak of Shakspere as a prophet, or even as a religious man? His answer to that was, that he would not be able to speak of both, if he did not think Shakspere was both. Shakspere was not a prophet or religious teacher, in the sense say of Dr. Doddridge or Dr. Watts ; he was something higher and better, he rose above mere morals and preached and prophesied to us of life. While not a priest in the ordinary sense of the word, we must know how much he had done to humanise and therefore christianise mankind. He who had read the 'Merchant of Venice,' Macbeth or Hamlet, had heard sermons more precious than any homilies of the Pulpit." The late Bishop Fraser said, "No man could see Hamlet without feeling his whole nature elevated and strengthened, and even spiritualised, and he thought that in a play there should be nothing that should compromise a man's dignity, nor a woman's purity.'

In addition, let me add the statement of the Archbishop of Dublin, "That Shakespeare was the child of the England of the Reformation and was born of its spirit." Testimony practically infinite, might also be adduced from the writings of the noblest churchmen, that the poet's aim was wholly directed to the teaching of wise well-doing, and courageous endurance, as the true secrets of life, and that when death ensues, as ensue it must, the readiness is all.

A confessed, vehement, and inexorable hostility to the stage is not, however, the growth of a day. It has a remote and venerable antiquity; which was but the shadow and reflection of a too vivid and sanctimonious asceticism and purity. Thus, it would perhaps appear startling, and even shock some persons to be told, that it was not the virtues but the vices of the early Christians that led to their manifold persecutions. Their sense of superiority made them intolerant. Secure in their own self-satisfied sanctity, they regarded all out of their own pale, as outcasts and heathens. Their morality had no leaven of sympathy or charity. They enjoyed in contemplation the ages of "unutterable anguish," which all unbelievers would be doomed to endure. The unreformed were to them loathsome and hateful as children of the devil. Their simplest usages were idolatrous. The most innoxious customary rites of hospitality, piety, or sacrifice, were equally condemned. This puritanic anathema was directed not only against the dramatic stage, but against all and every species of amusement and recreation. Against music in all its forms, dancing, piping, health drinking, the use of flowers, decoration with laurel leaves, painting, sculpture, rhetoric, even poetry. Indeed all the Arts presided over by Apollo and the Muses were denounced as consecrated to idolatry and paganism. They were all the devices and pollutions of the devil. These were "the pomps and vanities of this wicked world" which still find a place in our Liturgy. These were the "obscenities, heathen frivolities, superstitions and lewdnesses" so obnoxious to the early fathers of our faith.

Tertullian comprehensively included every species of æsthetic enjoyment in his vast and vigorous denunciation of worldly pleasures. In his De Spectaculis, he as much assailed a tragedy of Euripides, as a fight of gladiators. All public spectacles, all triumphs, all open displays of elegance and luxury, were treated as idolatrous and hellish in his so-called "Apology." He accused the Pagan Gods of nameless and unspeakable crimes, denied alike their power and immortality, satirised their religious rites, and imputed debauchery to their Priests and Vestals. The Octavius of Minucius Felix more temperate in tone is to the same end.

The first movement against the youthful and growing stage in England by the Puritans, was a revival of this hostility. Gosson who in his "School of Abuse" in 1579, opened an attack on the drama and poetry generally, renewed and echoed this enmity,

and adopted the same general, indiscriminate, and vehement tone of invective and condemnation. All ministrants to pleasure and amusement were abused as abominable. The Devil himself was declared to be "The father and parent of theatrical interludes," "which no man can disprove," says Gosson "by any orthodox record," which was no doubt true. They were adders all, that stung with pleasure and killed with pain. These charges were again and again repeated between 1579 and 1633, when Prynne poured forth the pent up vials of his Puritanic wrath in the voluminous pages of "Histrio Mastix."

There is no mystery in this bigotry, this intolerance. Every institution, no matter how elevated or elevating, no matter how sacred and exalted, has its reverse side of debasement and defilement. This is the inevitable lot of all earthly contrivances. Let us consider for a moment what crimes, what cruelties, what atrocities have sheltered themselves under the Ægis and sacred protection of Christianity. Torture in all its worst aspects, midnight massacres, and the burnings and stranglings of the most innocent at the stake. The Auto da Fees, the immolations, the life-long persecution of the most unoffending and virtuous, all have been perpetrated in the sacred names of piety and religion. We may thus realise at once how invariable this association of virtue with vice is. It is as of substance and shadow. Just as light begets darkness, so the shadow follows the sun. The reflex action seems almost inevitable. The pious zeal of Proselytism by man's infirmity becomes the pernicious zeal of persecution. The trite proverb "Omnium rerum quarum usus est potest esse abusus, virtute sola excepta," is truest, without its limitation. Thus not merely sober amusements and legitimate pleasures, but every virtue, every excellence, patriotism, charity and devotion, have at times been freighted with the follies, mischievous and misdirected zeal and even crimes of their professors, and have appeared to bear within themselves the seeds of these their abuses; their umbra as part of their sweetness and light.

This inevitable tendency, for such it is, of pity or piety to merge into passion, of temperance in thought, to become intemperance in act, of bias to become bigotry is universal. It seems indeed the nexus or bond between virtue and vice, which often makes excess the only measure of depravity. Vice being but an excess of virtue. This infirmity may well be supposed to be exaggerated in every aspect of expression of sensuous or sensual pleasure. A source of enjoyment and delight like the stage, ministering to the natural appetite for recreation, and the simple animal (also natural) craving for amusement, lends itself easily to many abuses. Its innocent illusions submit themselves, almost suggestively to deceit and self indulgence. Its æsthetic fascinations tend to immorality and as art advances to effeminacy and

vice. The capacity to feign, the art of feigning, must of themselves and of necessity lend aid to inherent insincerity. Splendours extravagance and display, lead naturally to dissipation and decay.

On this account in all ages, perhaps rationally, a prejudice has existed against the influence of the stage on its special ministrants, myrmidons and followers; especially its feminine allies, and those who are most intimately connected, as Mr. Scott phrases it, with its allurements, or engaged in its spectacles, deceptions and illusions. The very attractiveness essential to their success, in something which is to give pleasure and delight, as being superior to ordinary life, is a well nigh fatal, certainly a very hazardous possession. It constitutes its possessors, the immediate objects of envy: the most active, potent and uniformly earnest agent of mischief in this sublunary world. It makes them the cynosure of all eyes, the observed of all observers, and the best detested people of their time. Well has the Poet said:

> "Hard is his fate, on whom the public gaze
> Is fixed for ever to detract or praise.
> . . . .
> The secret enemy whose sleepless eye
> Stands sentinel—accuser, judge—and spy.
> . . . .
> Behold the host! delighting to deprave,
> Who track the steps of glory to the grave.
> Distort the truth, accumulate the lie,
> And pile the pyramid of calumny."

The boundary between excellence and its excess, as already pointed out, being so narrow, the natural tendency of man is to overstep the line of right. The step from propriety to impropriety is easy and often tempting. In the most corrupt ages of the Roman Empire in its decline, the fact that the stage was, as it is, and ever must be, but an echo of the public taste, a mirror of its follies a minister to its pleasures, and even to its depravities, induced no doubt many deviations, from that purpose of moral teaching and wise enjoyment, which was its proper mission. The worst Emperors, Nero, Caligula, Tiberias, Augustus, Domitian, pandering to the vicious tendencies and banalities of the mob took part as we know in the games of the circus, and in stage performances. They exalted base and animal pleasures above the pursuits of reason or virtue. They degraded the stage from its position of mentor and guide. to be a minister to their most ignoble pleasures and basest inclinations. Thus fostered, it was encouraged in every species of abuse and licentiousness, of dissipation and display, as part of the means of popularity and of the art of government. In like manner to adopt the weighty words of Dryden when speaking of Shakspere, and Beaumont and Fletcher: "That they had written to the genius of the age and

nation in which they lived, which differs in every epoch, in every climate, and every disposition of the people, transitory or otherwise." It is thus we arrive at the gross indecencies of Congreve and Wycherly, Vanbrugh, Dryden, and Mrs. Behn. The stage but reflected back the morals and the manners of the hour. Of that fateful and hateful time so powerfully described by Macaulay :

> "Then came those days, never to be recalled without a blush, the days of servitude without loyalty and sensuality without love, of dwarfish talents and gigantic vices, the paradise of cold hearts and narrow minds, the golden age of the coward, the bigot, and the slave. The King cringed to his rival, that he might trample on his people, sunk into a viceroy of France and pocketed with complacent infamy her degrading insults, and more degrading gold. The caresses of harlots, and the jests of buffoons, regulated the measures of a government which had just ability enough to deceive, and just religion enough to persecute. . . . . . . Crime succeeded to crime, and disgrace to disgrace till the race, accursed of God and man, was a second time driven forth to wander on the face of the earth, and to be a by-word and a shaking of head to the nations."

This state of morals, this degradation, this infamy, this absence of all virtue and triumph of every vice, necessarily produced its reflection on the stage. We have another graphic picture from the same pen of the results. "During the forty years which followed the Restoration the whole body of the dramatists invariably represent adultery, we do not say as a peccadillo—we do not say as an error which the violence of passion may excuse—but as the calling of a fine gentleman ; as a grace without which his character would be imperfect" All the agreeable qualities are always given to the gallant. All the contempt and aversion are the portion of the unfortunate and abused husband who is invariably represented as "a fool or a tyrant, or both."

Naturally these scandalous immoralities provoked rebuke and denunciation. Thus in 1698 when Jeremy Collier presented his "Short View of the profaneness and immorality of the English stage" there was again revived and renewed the old antipathy and intolerance. The denunciations of Tertullian, Origen, Minucius Felix, and St. Chrysostom, of Gosson, Heywood and Prynne, against all theatric and histrionic art, were once more repeated. Who shall say that they were not needed. No man, it is true, had been found bold enough to denounce the vile iniquities and indecencies of the stage, while Charles was on the throne as their patron and examplar, but they were not the less flagrantly and manifestly the proper objects of reprehension. The dramas of the day were execrably immoral and lascivious. Dryden confessed this remorsefully, and as he surveyed the monstrous brood to which directly and indirectly he had given birth, apologised in later life, with contrition for his delinquencies. His

followers and imitators, incapable of copying his excellencies, had easily surpassed him in his depravities.

When William III began his reign, Jeremy Collier could assail all those vices which were no longer courtly or fashionable, with impunity. He might now be convinced as he said, "That stage poets and plays, had debauched the age." He could transfer the obloquy, due to the vices of the court, to the theatre, and thus make the play-house the scapegoat. In this, however, he was confounding cause and effect. The decade had produced enormities, and the stage but ministered to its vices. This was bad enough, but obscene plays were the result, and not the cause, of the pernicious morals and manners of the past reign. A man of singular honesty, earnestness and purity of morals, so far as is known, he was listened to with respect if not attention. With other times, other manners. It was no longer fashionable to hate your neighbour and to love your neighbour's wife; it was no longer *bon ton* to be a drunkard, gambler and debauchee; no longer essential to a nobleman that he should be without nobility; no longer claimed that adultery was the one approved grace of fashionable life. His attack, consequently, was sanctioned, if not received with sympathy, and the worst impurities of Mrs. Aphra Behn and Congreve, were for the time, if not for ever, in ignominy laid aside.

I do not defend the stage, but it is these crimes of ingrate predecessors that have still to be lived down. It is these once natural but now irrational prejudices which have to be superseded and set aside. It seems a positive anomaly, that so long after the evil has passed away, its malodorous results should survive in repute, if not in infamy. It seems an even greater absurdity, that after the lapse of nearly 300 years, it should be deemed necessary to step into the arena, to defend what is demonstrably pure, and what is unequivocally unsullied, and to ask tolerance for a drama dedicated to the noblest teaching, and which is inspired by the holiest and most laudable virtues of patriotism. honour, charity, and unalloyed excellence, as if it were in fact vicious and detestable. The whole sequence appears ludicrous. Profanity, obscenity, and vice are not inculcated by pictures of exalted purity, nor by examples of noble intention, nor is indecorum incited by elevated sentiments in exquisite diction. Vice cannot be fostered by a teaching wholly to good, and yet this is the purpose, this is the aim of all the eloquence, philosophy and poetry of our National Poet.

There are of course gross and indecent expressions and phrases in Shakspere, but they are more in manner than in substance, and were due to the barbarity of the age, the degraded tastes of masculine audiences, and the illiterate vulgarity of the

mob, for whose amusement they were framed. A Drama must be addressed to its auditory. It must not be above their heads, if it is to teach, it must teach as though it taught them not, if it aim to destroy "the cankerworms of peace," it must be easy to be understood. If it exposes the vices of fraud and hypocrisy, ambition or cruelty, it must be plain in its tuition. There are some bad and detestable characters in the Poet; but they are few, and their vices are held up uniformly to reprehension. We despise even while we pity Othello, in spite of his valour and greatness of soul. We loathe Iago in spite of his wit and transient success. We honour Henry the Vth and Brutus, in spite of their failings. The moral purpose of all the Poet's dramas is plain. There are no attractive smiling and successful villains, no graceful and accomplished scoundrels, no women of transcendant vices and resplendant charms. The high way of honesty is maintained, the lines of right and wrong are never confounded. There are no gallant and exquisite adulterers, and on all occasions depravity is scourged, humiliated and held up to our unqualified reprobation.

There is in Shakspere no adornment of what is in its nature despicable, as in the dramas of a later, and indeed of the present day. No exaltation of women with pasts, as if the only avenue to our regard was infamy and the pathway to society was a sewer. There is no homage to the Mrs. Hallers, or the Mrs. Tanquerays, or the "Lady of the Camelias." No loathsome dissections of cancerous, abnormal and indefinable abominations, as in Ibsen or Zola. Such blemishes as really do exist, and they are not many, are of expression only. They were part of the coarseness of the age, they were intended for the Alsatians, the men of the camp and the sword, the groundlings of the assembly, whom the Author catered for, but despised. Even such objectionable phrases and allusions as occur, are placed in the mouths of the ignoble and infamous, the churls, fools and witlings, and the low comedians of the day, and as part of the equipment of vicious and vulgar life which it was the Poet's mission to present as faithfully as its higher phases. But this charge of grossness of language, is slight and trivial and immaterial, in relation to the body of Shaksperean literature. The only serious or actual imputation is that, which is professedly levelled against the teaching and mission of Shakspere. That which I have indicated already, in the criticism I have read to you. In that hostility which enshrines the prejudice of ages, in that aversion of the ignorant virtuous, of the uninstructed and uninformed order loving citizen, and which is the vital and dangerous antagonism to be faced. Prejudices die hard, they are not the less difficult to kill, that they were originally misdirected or unfounded. It matters not; that this Stratford literature, the purest and noblest in its essence that we own, is in its teaching pious and even religious that it enshrines in its matchless poetry an elevated

philosophy, wit, homage to humanity, statesmanship, eloquence and appeals of the most entrancing kind to our purest emotions, our senses of charity, pity, mercy, forbearance, our honour, valour and patriotism: the prejudice (because these qualities are exhibited in a play) still exists. It is misplaced, it is repugnant to reason; still it is as hard to kill as any other ancient and established superstition. The aversion as it survives, is not especial as against Shakspere's plays, but is against all dramas, all stage plays, all play-houses, all theatrical entertainments whatsoever, and it knows neither tolerance nor discrimination.

Yet what can be more absurd, than an animosity levelled against an institution as being impious, for maintaining follies which it devotes itself to suppressing; when its mission also is a most exalted Protestantism, whose teaching is not merely moral but devotional. Which inculcates virtue in every line and thought, and inspires men by pictures of a better life, and which in its most direct intention, in all elements of fundamental faith is in strict accord with and fervently enforces, the teaching of the New Testament. It is an imbecile fallacy to advance, that because poetry is dramatic or histrionic, it must necessarily be impure and obnoxious. That virtue is really vice if you but name it so. That good becomes evil by so esteeming it. Shakspere wrote for the play-house because his bitter fortune compelled him to that species of livelihood. It was the only avenue of poetic thought in his day. The world of readers was few, books were scarce and dear. The stage play was the newspaper of the time. His probation, like that of many geniuses before and since, was first to learn to live, and then to live to learn. His experience epitomised both disciplines. In this way alone, he was enabled to enrich his dramas with a code of morals and of manners, and of practical wisdom of the highest refinement, and to stud his slightest and most fugitive dialogues with gems of thought and philosophy, which wholly apart from their scenic aptitude and histrionic adaptation, were enough to enrich all the literature of all the ages of all the peoples of the earth.

My complaint against my fervid friend, Mr. Clement Scott, is that he is too subsequent. That he revives the fanaticism of the early fathers. That he ignores the examples of the highest exponents of the art, he reveres, admires, and adorns. Are lawyers better than play actors, that he should decry the players, or are doctors, or even critics more perfect.

> "I know your lawyers can with ease
> Twist words and meanings as they please,
> And language by their skill made pliant
> Can bend to favour every client."

And about doctors and critics I could say something. I would desire him to protest with St. Chrysostom, when denouncing

Ibsen, "That theatres are oratories of the evil one, temples of iniquity, and that they bring the oracles of God into contempt," but not when they are performing noble service and doing their duty. We do not deserve the indiscriminate animosity of the Saints. That included, as we know, music and all necessary enjoyments which administer to the most exalted and spiritual delights of man. I object to his confounding elevated and pious instruction with "the pomps and vanities of this wicked world." With his mixing luxuries, lust and lasciviousness, with things of good report. Even in the best ages of Greece, Plato denounced the open blasphemies against the immortal Gods, indulged in, in the choruses of Euripides; but he did not denounce Euripides, but the blasphemers. The Puritans ascribed to the stage "the vices they had no mind to, while practising all they were inclined to;" but with this general denunciation we have no sympathy. Shall we denounce virtue because it is sometimes intolerant; piety because it has been a nursing mother at times to cruelty, bigotry and intolerance. I think not. What says Pierce Penniless in praise of the stage, "That in plays all cunning devices, all frauds, overgilded with holiness; all stratagems of war, all the canker worms that breed on the rust of peace are exposed. That God is evermore just in punishing murder; that the policy of plays is very necessary; that no immortality can be given on earth to a man, like being embalmed in a stage play. That a hope of such immortality is better than can be hoped from a mere love of lucre or filthy avarice."

Let us assume in drawing to a conclusion, that many plays are in their nature and essence, evil. That they are malignantly corrupt like Ibsen's, or foul and unnatural like Oscar Wild's, or indecent like some of Pinero's; shall we also, on that account, forbear good and virtuous dramas. Shall I cease to eat because many men have died of gluttony; shall I fear to ride because many men have been thrown, or to go to sea because many men have been drowned; I trow not. Is the food we enjoy, less calculated to nourish us, because it was killed in a squalid neighbourhood, in an æsthetically offensive slaughter house? We may still thrive on it. "Let the galled jade wince, our withers are unwrung." I have again and again said, that the study of Shakspere may be and is wholly independent of dramatic interpretations, and further,

> "That the Stage but echoes back the public voice.
> . . . .
> That the dramas laws the dramas patrons give,
> For they that live to please must please to live."

The stages assailants would deny us fire, because some houses have been burned down. They would restrain the sober because many drink immoderately, "not wisely, but too well." They

condemn all to penance, for an individual infirmity; they would muzzle all sound and healthy dogs, because one dog has gone mad. We desire the fire to warm, the water to assuage our thirst, the food to sustain us; and shall we ostracise all pleasures of the soul, because many men are animal, some are bestial, a few unnatural.

I now return to my first, which is also my final aspect, of the Poet, viz., his name and fame as an Englishman; as a representative Englishman: as a man of Teutonic and not of Celtic or Iberian, or Semitic Race. His personal attributes, so far as they are known to us like his name are all peculiarly English. He was patient, undemonstrative, self-contained, self-restrained, gentle, earnest, and sincere. His effigy bequeathed us, is that of a sanguine, fair-haired, hazel-eyed Englishman. To adopt D'Israelis phrase he was "A flat-nosed Frank." He may have had mixed blood in his veins, but there is no trace of it in his sympathies. Living under a Tudor sovereign, and with a Welsh patron, he is just to Welsh valour, but does not spare the foibles of Fluellen or Evans on that account. The first-named was the undoubted portrait of Sir Roger Williams, a famous soldier who occupied an important place in the history of his time, and was as familiar a figure in London life between 1589 and December 1595 when he died, as Sir John William Maclure to Manchester men to-day.

Naturally as a Briton, his portraits of men and women are chiefly English, but the Poet's universal eye, had as we know, no visible preference. In his Italian and Roman plays he has preserved with fidelity the special characteristics of the people and race he is delineating. Macbeth is a thorough Celt. The Poet had no discoverable leanings. The only mode of tracing his sympathies or partialities, if any, is by analysis of the utterances of his heroes or the people he delighted to honour. These only speak with the wisdom or nobility, that is not to be gainsayed. As a whole, his works prove demonstrably, how generous, how candid and tolerant he was in his judgments. That as he epitomised the Protestantism, the love of liberty of his age, its adventure and enterprise, indeed all its salient features, he in like manner condensed the ideal character of the typical Englishman. This personality has been said to be self-restrained, self-reliant, self-contained and self-complacent. His enemies add also, selfish, self-seeking, self-satisfied, all self. If this is true, Shakspere was certainly impersonal. He is always impartial. His only leanings are for virtue and right. He honours valour, firmness, truth, justice, modesty and toleration. His resources of learning, of wisdom, of generosity, are unparallelled. But it may be asked in what respect are his attributes so peculiarly redolent of the soil, as "native to the manner born." Toleration, patriotism, promptitude in action, celerity of resolve, practical wisdom, a profound reverence for discipline, or law and order, deference to authority

homage even to idolatry of women, humour, comradeship, fidelity in friendship, sincerity, and a certain devil-may-care levelheadedness and severity on occasion, coupled with an almost feminine tenderness.

> "a tear for pity and a hand
> Open as day for melting charity."

These are the qualities illustrated in Henry the Vth, Brutus and Hamlet. Many of these features were proved in Alfred the Great—a typical Englishman—the prototype of our race. They are all expressed in the Poet's earliest favourite ideals. In Mercutio, Valentine, Henry the IVth, Falconbridge, Theseus Talbot, John O'Gaunt, Ulysses, the Duke in "As You Like It," and in later years, in Prospero, Othello, the Duke in "Measure for Measure," and even Wolsey when baited by his despicable assailants. Of friendship in its most robust form, as comradeship or good fellowship, and as it is illustrated in Antonio, Hamlet, and Horatio he has given us typical examples.

It must not be supposed that I arrogate these excellencies or resources of character as solely English, or as peculiar and proper only to my countrymen: Heaven forbid. We have no monopoly of virtue or manhood, whatever some of us may believe to the contrary. Do not let me be misunderstood. They are only English ideals wrought into their life, as exemplified in action and dramatic representation. If they were lived up to in practice, they would cease to be ideals. They are ideals so long as men are inspired by their best aspects and example, and desire to emulate and apply them.

Every nation has its own patriotism and devotion. Many peoples have a higher general standard of honesty, of piety, of religion, of gallantry, a livelier sense of honour, and a more sacred sense of filial duty and reverence. I must confess also that these recited attributes of ours, as we claim them, are by no means conceded by our rivals and enemies. The hero we enshrine in the National Walhalla, by the light of hostile criticism, appears very different in aspect and effect when seen from a distance, and in a foreign land, or when approached from the reverse side. This Anglican then appears perfidious, exclusive, intolerant, insatiable. We are said to be purse-proud, ill-mannered, aggressive, insolent; we are symbolised by the cruel and treacherous leopard, who will not change his spots, but who is always ready to seize those of others. We are at once crafty, treacherous, and inexorable. We cannot hope to satisfy all critics We are angular, prudish, pragmatic, prejudiced, puritanic. These are the favourite descriptive epithets applied to us by friendly foreigners. Shall we gainsay them? Without admitting we are as black as we are painted, we confess the real personality falls vastly below the ideal. Shakspere only offers us his ideals. In his dramas we

appear attractive. We seem full of charity, mercy and pity, valiant, forbearing above all things, and nothing if not acting in sincerity and with justice.

I have perhaps said more this evening than I intended, in defending what needs no defence, the Poet's mission. That, to some by no means hostile critics, I have claimed too much moral purpose and even religious teaching in his dramas, seeing that some are coarse and unplayable without mutilation, and none of them have an obvious moral, except of the simplest kind. He in truth was never didactic. Nature is not didactic; yet to the intelligent much is taught, much is discoverable. I merely insist that the streams of life and nutrition in the poet flow in the ancient, natural and accustomed channels. The rain falls on the just and the unjust: the brook flows to the river, the river to the sea, as in nature. The sap ascends, and the currents of filial and paternal love of womanly devotion, of man's affection, are maintained in their antique and settled boundaries. In many modern plays a different law obtains: the streams flow upward and against nature, and all the accustomed forces seem turned topsy turvey. In these, the scheme of conjugal life is to discover that marriage spells misery, or how much two persons can justifiably hate and detest each other. People marry only to divorce, and divorce only to marry. The woman has no charm unless she be an adulteress, past, present, or future, or one and all; the man no interest if he be not a seducer and a scoundrel. If some nameless and unspeakable vice or passion, incestuous or worse, is not hinted at or indicated, as in the natural course of events, we must consider ourselves fortunate. The Bard of Avon to them worked on contemptible lines; he always followed nature, and nature uniformly puts out these erotic geniuses. The sun extinguishes these tallowy flickering flames. The "Poet of all time" was content on all occasions to pursue the lines of truth: in some world-renowned story, on the confines of tradition. In the Chronicles, to adhere to history, as he understood it; yet on the testimony of Marlborough, Chatham and Buonaparte, he was the best English historian.

In his tragedies and comedies there are large lessons for the intelligent. As the true lover of nature discovers gratitude, grounds for æsthetic admiration, reverence, devotional worship, awe, love, and beneficence in the beautiful world he surveys, the genuine lover of art may discern marvellous lessons of moral truth, in the Poet's dramas. Not merely the penalties that punish, and wait on unbridled lust, ambition, or cruelty, but those that pursue all excess. Excess of virtue as of vice; excess in love, in affection, of fatherly indulgence, even of generosity and confidence in humanity, indeed of all ill-regulated, wanton, or unstinted excellence and nominal excellence or supposed sanctity. Men

are thereby taught the necessity of a discipline of the mind. The virtues of self-restraint; the advantages of courtesy, refinement, honour, and manners. In the plays, the spectator may see the ideal of what a gentleman in reality is, and should be. He can contemplate the highest standard of perfection in grace and valour, and courtesy in man, and of purity and saintliness in woman. For our Dramatist recognised his mission, as teacher and instructor, as well as Creator. That in all ages poetry had been a stimulant and incentive to an exalted and purer life; that it has ever educated and incited men to true renown; and "that a man's life is not to be trifled away, but is to be sacrificed and offered up, to just causes, honourable enterprises, great deeds, and a noble ambition." He knew that in all ages, in poesy, this purpose had been maintained. That as the Lacaedemonians had been provoked and instructed to emulation, valour, and patriotism, by the verse of Tyrtaeus, and the Argives by that of Telesilla, we might see in the noble exploits of worthy captains, the famous enterprises of noble men, an exact portraiture of our most considerable triumphs, and be offered a worthy shrine for our admiration and homage. For this the Poet's Chronicle plays, being as the critics say, "neither true comedies nor true tragedies," embalm to us, such heroes as we must be content with. No Thomas Carlyle it is true; no faultless monsters; they are all in Drumtochty. He placed before us images of the most perfect and ideal men, according to his standard; and who shall say they are not. They are by no means perfect specimens of humanity. His figures are all very human. Often faulty, foolish, weak, impulsive, credulous, and headstrong, and which of us is otherwise. They include such poor creatures as Talbot, Duke Humphrey, Mowbray, Wolsey, John O'Gaunt, King Hal, and the rest. They are not Andrew Langs, and I cannot further defend them.

That the prejudice which confounds such creations with impiety, with frivolity, with—as Prynne has said—"the pomps and vanities, and the sinful lusts of the flesh" is surely a mere intolerance at once unintelligent and malign. Unintelligent as assailing purity with opprobrium; malign as being perverse, caluminous and bigotted. It takes the view of Tennyson's Aunt, who, hearing that he wrote poetry, at once condemned him to perdition. One day she said to him, "Alfred, Alfred, when I look at you I think of the words of Holy Scripture, 'Depart from me ye accursed into everlasting fire.'" This provided and inevitable end of her nephew, was her chief source of happiness. We are told she was a rigid Calvanist, "who would weep for hours with joy because God was so infinitely good. Has he not damned most of my friends? But me, me, he has picked out for eternal salvation; me, who am no better than my neighbours." Thus, men in their religious prejudices and persecutions, read

their cruelty and vice into their creed, and called it Christianity. They are but performing the same function, in anathematising generally, the drama. It is no part of piety to be intolerant; no such teaching is to be found in the text of their faith; only patience, indulgence and pity. But we know that in all ages men have incorporated their own malignant and vehement infirmities; their vain glory, pride, malice, and all uncharitableness, into their faith, and thus belied the aim of all its sacred instruction. Thus, as a consequence, converting the doctrine of universal love into that of indiscriminate hate, and all true sympathy into a senseless hostility. One word in conclusion as to the Poet's enforcement of "revealed religion" as I have, I think, suggested. Throughout, the plays are saturated with biblical expression and thought. The author's various allusions to the terrors of death, to the beneficence of Heaven, to the scheme of immortality, to the dignity of the soul, the efficacy of prayer, all are strictly scriptural. The tone of reflection is the same. If the student will take the trouble to compare the forms of expression and allusions with the book of Psalms, he will be at once surprised to see, how completely the Poet echoes the sentiments derived from biblical teaching. His uniform deference to the solace of devotion, and of divine worship, are identical. When old Shallow says in his senility, repeating the lessons of his youth, to Silence, "Death, as the Psalmist says, is certain to all; all shall die," the poet merely adopts and utters in another form the words of the sacred bard. The plays are indeed full of the simple phrases and language of the Genevese version of the Bible, the only translation with which the Poet was familiar. Such phrases as "the deaf adder," "the lantern to my feet," "the feeding of the ravens," "whiter than snow," are all unconscious allusions derived from the scriptures, which reflect or radiate the inspiration of a studious and devotional life. I could extend these references indefinitely, but it is unnecessary to labour so obvious a point unduly.

Let me briefly summarise the opinions I have advanced to-night. That the Poet has woven into the thread of English life the highest ideals which his poetic insight enabled him to conceive; models of the highest feminine purity and excellence, of the most varied womanly kind, ideals of action, of honour, of patriotism, fidelity in friendship, love, and justice, which are in their respective aspects unique, in all exalted. He has augmented the joyous illusions which are permitted to the soul, in spite of its earthy and earthly environment, and has added a whole world of pastoral and woodland beauty, of "deserts vast and antres wild," of the landscapes of Arden, of Belmont, and the Enchanted Isle quite beyond our actual experiences. He has assuaged the pains and multiplied the pleasures of ordinary existence. He has established his claims as a moral and religious teacher above all others, in spite of prejudice

and misguided fanaticism. That rightly understood, in spite of occasional lapses of coarseness and impurity, which are much more of manner than of matter, his ministrations are wholly to a pure beneficence, to virtue, and the exaltation of religion and piety. That the morals of his plays are uniformly sound, and that in all his plots the great highways of nature are preserved. There are no harmless or illicit vices. There is no varnish of specious pleading tendered in favour of unnatural crimes. No attempt is made to palliate the inexcusable. His life shows no beautiful and attractive demons, or gallant and exquisite rogues; and all its shows and pageants are strictly in conformity with the harmony of nature.

Let me add my felicitations in my last words, that we are in a happier condition to understand and appreciate his excellence and his merits, than at any period, since in April 1616, he was laid to his final rest. Our criticism is more reverential, more discerning and apprehensive, more cultured and wise than at any antecedent epoch in the history of his name and fame, and we are now in a better position to know and discriminate the greatest glory of our people, the very foremost man of the Universal world, who was fortuitously born of an English speaking race.

F. S. L.
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